

# APPEAL APPLICATION RECEIVED

**GENERAL INFORMATION:** (Please print)

 Date: 2025 NOV -3 AM 11:21  
November 3, 2025

 Appellant: John Callas, Sharon Bober, and Concerned Neighbors

 Mailing Address: 1560 Scenic Drive

 City: Pasadena State: CA Zip: 91103

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 Applicant (if different from appellant): Peter Tolkin, TOLO Architecture
**APPEAL APPLICATION**

 Application # \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Decision October 23, 2025 Appeal Deadline November 3, 2025

 Property Address: 1530 Scenic Drive, Pasadena, CA 91103

 I hereby appeal the decision of the: Board of Zoning Appeals

The decision maker failed to comply with the provisions of the zoning ordinance in the following manner:

See Attachment A

If necessary, please attach additional sheets



Applicant's Signature

November 3, 2025

Date of Application

Activity # \_\_\_\_\_

Application Fee: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Appeal Hearing Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date Received: \_\_\_\_\_

Received by: \_\_\_\_\_

Attachment A  
HDP #7134: 1530 Scenic Drive  
REASONS FOR APPEAL

The Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) did not correctly consider and apply all applicable Pasadena Ordinances and policies to the proposed Project, including Pasadena's Zoning Code and Hillside Overlay Ordinance (Hillside Ordinance).

Specifically:

1) Neighborhood Compatibility. Despite one of the major purposes of the Hillside Ordinance being to preserve neighborhood scale and character the Board of Zoning Appeals failed to properly apply the provisions of the Hillside Overlay District Ordinance requiring it to address how the size, massing, and scale of the proposed project is "compatible" with the neighborhood. That the applicant is seeking a variance is an obvious red-flag when it comes to evaluating such compatibility. But the BZA simply ignored the fact that the proposed house is more than twice the size of homes in this neighborhood (median 2,045 square feet). They also ignored how it does not align with the City of Pasadena General Plan Policy 22.1 Appropriate Scale and Massing - Discourage mansionization by requiring building scale and massing that is compatible with existing development in single-family residential neighborhoods. In addition to the proposed residence floor area of 4,280 square feet, the massing of the project includes a 2,685 square foot below-grade garage, and 864 square foot pool deck. Almost 8,000 square feet is proposed in a neighborhood with homes a quarter of that size. Last, contrary to their findings, the architectural design of the proposed residence does not hide nor disguise the massing as the roofline of the structure does not step down with the natural terrain. To the contrary, the roof design lacks architectural features consistent with the homes in the neighborhood and the front façade does not maintain the traditional scale and character of the neighborhood as the first floor of the proposed residence has substantial solid concrete walls, no windows, and two solid bronze access doors facing the street, none of which is compatible with the neighborhood.

2) Biological Resources. The Board of Zoning Appeals failed to properly evaluate the significance of the inadequate, incorrect, and incomplete Constraints Analysis and Biological Resources report required by the Hillside Ordinance for this project. Specifically, despite direct and substantial evidence, testimony from residents of Scenic Drive and Vista Lane, numerous photographs, and a letter from the Arroyos and Foothills Conservancy urging the Board of Zoning Appeals to require additional environmental review citing an Inadequate Biological Resources Assessment, the Board of Zoning Appeals failed to recognize that the proposed plans for development of this hillside lot on Scenic Drive, adjacent to the Cottonwood Canyon wildlife corridor, in the San Rafael Hills may be considered a sensitive area for development and as such may require additional environmental review. Residents have observed this hillside lot as habitat for wildlife and birds for years.

3) Environmental Impact. The Preliminary Grading Plan shows the recontouring of the hillside and removal of 2,413 cubic yards of soil. This excessive grading will remove half of the mature tree canopy, 34 trees (20 protected native trees), with native tree heights ranging from 25 - 35 feet. As a result, the proposed project will significantly change the natural hillside topography, that currently supports canopy cover, slope stability, nesting bird habitat, and biodiversity. With the removal of the towering trees from the uphill side of this lot, the massing of the house structure will be even more apparent as the flat roofline will not be offset by the backdrop of mature canopy. While a major purpose of the Hillside Development Permit is to ensure a proposed project minimizes its visual and environmental impact, the Board of Zoning Appeals failed to account for how the tree removal on this lot impacts the hillside topography. Even though the proposed project includes a tree replacement plan, the replacement trees are not a substitute for the loss of continuity of the tree-lined landscape that connects adjacent properties. This loss not only diminishes the visual appeal and overall aesthetic value of the neighborhood, but it also impacts wildlife and the overall environmental health of the area.

4) Landscape Plan. The Board of Zoning Appeals failed to recognize that the required proposed Tree Replacement and Landscape Design Plan as required by Zoning Code Section 17.12.020 does not meet the conditions of sustainability over the long term. In a review of the proposed Tree Replacement and Landscape Design plan, the selection of the larger replacement trees, 48-inch and 72-inch box trees, fail to support sustainability over the long term because studies show that the larger replacement trees have a higher failure rate than 24-inch box trees. The landscape plan also overcrowds the placement of the larger trees with existing or new trees, failing to account for the appropriate distances from structures and neighboring trees conducive to tree survivability over time, thus further rendering it unsustainable.

5) Excavation and Grading – The Board of Zoning Appeals failed to address the Hillside Ordinance Site Developments standards for grading compliance. Zoning code Section 14.05 states the cumulative height of retaining walls (existing, new, replacement or combination) built because of cuts or fills pursuant to this chapter shall not exceed 8 feet in height as viewed in the vertical plane. In a review of the Preliminary Geotechnical Report, it states retaining walls will be constructed along the margins of the basement level and will serve as interior walls. The retaining walls on the west side of the residence will be 18 feet and 12 feet in height on the east side. Retaining walls for the driveway will also be constructed for the proposed descending driveway to provide access to the basement level garage, all of which exceed 8 feet in height.

6) Construction Plan – Approximately 150 dump trucks will be required to remove the 2,143 cubic yards (net) of soil and 90 more dump trucks to remove the 34 trees, even before construction of the foundation of the house begins, which will result in cement trucks around the clock to pour it. We ask that the proposed plans for development on this lot minimize the grading and follow the Hillside Ordinance Purpose, 17.20.010.B -- Maintain an environmental equilibrium consistent with native vegetation, animal life, geology, slopes, which means balancing the cut and fill of the hillside lot with minimal export.